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ABSTRACT

Despite its imperfections, secondary schooling in America functions well; the school principal is very important as he or she helps to lessen any deterrents. An example of this is the newly assigned principal who causes dramatic turnarounds with a stable but somnolent faculty. In a question-and-answer format, this document addresses 40 topics including various aspects of staff development and criteria for effective self and staff enrichment. (KM)

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A PERSONNEL
DEVELOPMENT GUIDE
FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

By Robert Morgan

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Staff Enhancement

A PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT GUIDE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

By Robert Maidment

National Association of Secondary School Principals
Reston, Virginia

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PREFACE

Staff development is a billion dollar industry. More and more leaders in private and public sectors acknowledge that continuous upgrading in performance is a hallmark of the professional. We've applied the word "enhancement" to embrace both "inservice," a term, unfortunately, often connoting prescriptive and piecemeal approaches, and "staff development," a term implying more planned and purposeful activity.

Secondary schooling in America functions well despite admitted imperfections, and principals do help lessen deterrents. We've all observed, for example, a newly assigned principal cause dramatic turn-arounds with a stable, but somnolent, faculty.

The notations, here in question-and-answer format, highlight the various aspects of staff development and provide criteria for effective self and staff enhancement.

Enhancement No. 1
Note the Distinctions

Q. *Let's be candid. Is staff development simply inservice in disguise?*

A. We're familiar with educational name changing—library to resource center, visual aid to non-print medium, and goal to behavioral objective. In this case, however, it is more than a semantic switch. Regrettably, the word "inservice" evokes unsavory memories for many teachers who recall sterilized, simplistic, soporific, and sporadic attempts to improve their performance. The emergent term, staff development, implies more inclusive, cooperative, rigorous, meaningful, and systematic approaches to personal and professional growth. While some programs excel under either banner, it's often a distinction with a real difference.

Enhancement No. 2
Enjoy the Role

Q. *What is the principal's role in staff development?*

A. While school boards and central office personnel provide funding and focus, it is the principal who executes all officially sanctioned programs and encourages the individual efforts of staff members to improve performance. The principal is in the unique position of being the stimulator of ideas, allocator of resources, coordinator of events, monitor of progress, and disseminator of results. We call it "enhancement"—providing the means for personal and group renewal and creating a climate for thriving within the process.

Enhancement No. 3
Attend to Both Functions

Q. *How does career development differ from staff development?*

A. Career development usually tracks one's entire work life—promotions, transfers, advanced degrees, additional coursework, and other evidences of professional advancement. Staff development typically tracks the day-to-day, month-to-month, semester-to-semester record of personal and/or professional growth activity. Often, career development is a centralized, personnel office function, while staff development is a decentralized function with curricular and instructional specialists taking more responsibility. It's not a question of either/or, but, rather, one of both/and. Each function must be well served.

Enhancement No. 4
Become a "Principal Teacher"

Q. *Just how important is staff development?*

A. Simply underscoring the venerable saw, "Those who teach must never cease to learn," is an insufficient inducement. Left to our own devices we tend not to assign top priority to self-enhancement. Recall the classic management functions. One could easily insist that "controlling" is the most important function of management. But, control is a *given* in any organization, since in its absence we have nothing. Although training is subsumed under the "staffing" function, we'd provide it with a separate category. One could also reasonably insist that improving on-the-job performance distinguishes "principal teachers" from "principals." Here, the adjective is far more important than the noun.

Enhancement No. 5
Teach and Learn

Q. *If staff development is such a critical leadership function, why is it so often unattended?*

A. One can only speculate on the causes of neglect. Teaching and learning is our business. We're experts in teaching practices and learning patterns for *others*. Because that's what we do, we might assume that we also apply the principles of teaching and learning to ourselves. Try, for example, to motivate faculty members to improve their communication skills. A predictable response: "As a teacher, I *am* an effective communicator. I already know what I need to know!" Once we admit that we *don't* know everything, we are prepared to teach and to learn—simultaneously.

Enhancement No. 6
Embrace Them All

Q. *Who's included in "staff"?*

A. Every adult working under contract within a school is a staff member—from aides to administrators, and including all cafeteria, clerical, and custodial personnel. While local policies, state board regulations, and accrediting standards tend to focus primarily upon instructional personnel, all staff members are expected to participate in a systematic and continuous program of professional growth. Inservice activities should also be provided for other non-staff contributors to the educational program—from student teachers to volunteers. No one is exempt.

Enhancement No. 7
Live and Learn

Q. *Doesn't the act of teaching provide enough growth opportunities?*

A. Although teaching and learning are universally treated as separate entities, they are both part of a single life process called living. For teachers, especially, the mandate to pursue learning is crucial. *Docemur docendo*—(one) who teaches, learns. Studies suggest, however, that teachers generally do not read widely in their specialty, nor do they participate actively in national organizations representing their discipline. The counter lament of many teachers is that their work demands preclude the luxury of continuing study. Rather, it is this reality that persists as an essential, never as a luxury. To accept a lesser demand is to lead a lesser life. If we're coasting, we're going downhill.

Enhancement No. 8
Shape Up Until You Ship Out

Q. *Doesn't administrator competency and experience eventually eliminate the need for additional training?*

A. If you're implying that a veteran principal who has accumulated 30 hours beyond the master's degree and has "seen it all" should not be actively involved in growth efforts, the answer is a resounding "No." When, for example, was your last course in school law? Half of what you needed to know then is now obsolete; half of what you need to know now hasn't survived the judicial process. Those with earned doctorates should be particularly mindful of the need for continuous development. They usually know what they *don't* know.

Enhancement No. 9
Examine the Rationales

Q. *Aside from legal or professional mandates, what are some other reasons to involve staff members in self-development efforts?*

A. While the "have to" reasons are valid, the "want to" reasons are compelling. Probable residual benefits accruing from a systematic and continuous program of staff development include:

—Increasing staff members' receptivity for curricular, instructional, and administrative change

—Enabling staff members to have a stronger voice in shaping those decisions directly affecting their work

—Alerting all staff members to emerging research, techniques, and products as well as creating an environment for their application

—Enhancing personal autonomy, self-worth, teamwork, morale, motivation, inclusion, and the opportunity for added recognition.

Albeit, these reasons defy precise measurement. Whenever these "want to" reasons supersede the "have to" ones, however, the results will be tangible.

Enhancement No. 10
Gain Meaningful Involvement

Q. *How do I get our staff members involved in staff development efforts?*

A. There are degrees of "involvement." When an unexpected memo demands staff members presence at an inservice activity somewhere, that's what you get—their presence, token involvement. But, when you enlist their ideas, help them design a professional growth plan, provide the appropriate technical and human resources, allow them to practice under guided conditions, and, finally, enable them to see whatever change has been effected, then you've achieved meaningful involvement. Doing something "to" or "for" them is usually a gamble. Doing something "with" them is often a guarantee.

Enhancement No. 11
Internalize the Process

Q. *We've done just about everything to help teachers improve, and I'm certain our efforts haven't worked. What's wrong?*

A. Although we're members of a "helping" profession, ironically, we're dependent upon those with whom we work to help themselves. If teaching is viewed as part of a more encompassing learning process, then all growth occurs internally. We teach ourselves. This is particularly true for adult learners who require fewer artificial trappings in self-appropriating knowledge. When enhancement efforts are focused upon the psychological, pedagogical, and personal interactions in classrooms, teachers tend to internalize and, consequently, improve beyond.

Enhancement No. 12
Seek Commitment

Q. *You seem to be making a distinction between involvement and commitment. What's the difference?*

A. I can be intellectually involved in an activity that is unlikely to alter my behavior. When committed to it, however, I'm psychologically "hooked" as well, and a behavioral change is probable. To illustrate: During an interview a sports celebrity claimed that her recent success resulted from a new commitment to her sport. When the reporter cited her history of deep involvement, she replied, "The next time you have ham and eggs for breakfast consider that while the chicken was involved, the pig was *committed!*"

Enhancement No. 13
Learn and Gain

Q. *Is there a distinction between teaching and training?*

A. Yes, there is a distinction if one thinks of teaching people and training animals; or, if training suggests the 3 Rs of recitation, rote memory, and regurgitation; or, once more, if one believes we teach for concepts and train for skills. Such responses disserve both teaching and training. Let's agree that such distinctions are artificial and the overlap, although extensive, is amorphous. The key word is *learning*—usually implying understanding, mastery, and growth. Because everyone learns things uniquely, matching content (what we learn) with style (how we learn) becomes more critical than whatever it's called. We teach *and* train; we learn *and* gain.

Enhancement No. 14
Insist Upon Mastery

Q. *Specifically, what is involved in learning a skill?*

A. For a partial response, visualize three intersecting circles labeled: (1) Value—Is mastering the skill worth something to me?, (2) Knowledge—What techniques must I learn?, and (3) Practice—Am I willing to exercise and refine the skill? If only two of these dimensions are operational, we experience a learning breakdown: (1) If I don't value the skill, I won't use it; (2) If I don't master all elements of the skill, it's of little use; or (3) If I don't practice the skill, I might as well not have learned it. But, when the three spheres intersect, we've created something permanent: lifetime learning.

Enhancement No. 15
Apply Learning Laws

Q. *Why do we seem to be more successful in educating students than ourselves?*

A. Perhaps we should apply a "reverse" Golden Rule—"Do unto ourselves what we do to others." While there are some differences in youth-adult learning patterns, the basic tenets governing how we learn are similar. We often overlook for adults, however, the very principles of learning deemed appropriate for students. Such familiar terms as recall, recognition, spaced practice, negative interference, variety, satisfiers, repetition, and knowledge of results apply to learners of all ages. You might suggest that your faculty members identify and codify a working set of "This I Believe" statements about learning, then collectively promise to honor them in all future staff development efforts. Here's a starter statement: "Learning is usually enhanced through active practice, seldom by passive reception."

Enhancement No. 16
Respect Adult Learning Patterns

Q. *Do adults learn differently?*

A. While time-honored laws of learning are valid for both adults and adolescents, patterns of learning vary for each. Adults draw upon extensive experiential data and are more skilled in diagnosing their own learning needs and in evaluating their own progress. And, as adults, they have opportunities to select and pursue a wider range of means to practice new skills in clinical settings. In short, adult learners are inclined to take more responsibility for their own learning. Perhaps this is the essential difference and the only one of real consequence.

Enhancement No. 17
Engage Consultants Sparingly

Q. *What about hiring outside specialists?*

A. Since any faculty has the built-in talent to exercise self-growth options, there is slight need for external agents to design, implement, or appraise various programs. Many consultants are at best uninformed, and at worst, insensitive about either a specific school climate or individual professional needs. Again, it is the principal, knowledgeable in both areas, who becomes the key coordinator for all school-based development efforts. Whenever staff members view growth opportunities with confidence and accept the results with pride, a sense of "We did this ourselves!" prevails. The best outside consultant is usually the least visible one.

Enhancement No. 18
Avoid the Tell and Sell

Q. *How effective are lectures by experts?*

A. When educators gather for inservice programs, the very approaches disdained in classrooms are often applied. The tell-and-sell pattern of "Do-as-I-say-because-I-say-so" doesn't yield any better results with adults than it does with younger learners. Decades of study on recall have reinforced that we remember about 70 percent of a lecture after three hours and only 10 percent in three days. Having someone demonstrate without adequate explanation improves recall slightly. But when a presenter lends the verbal with the visual, three-day recall soars to 65 percent. Now, imagine the recall effect once a listener actually practices the skill. Simulation is but one level removed from the real thing.

Enhancement No. 19
Follow Inspiration with Perspiration

Q. *Is there a place for inspirational speakers?*

A. Yes, occasionally, although lecturing to any group is a generally ineffective way to change a behavior. Whenever we can immediately practice what is preached, however, perhaps a new skill can be mastered, an attitude altered, or an interest aroused beyond the close of the presentation. Need a guideline? Never allow anyone, despite an aura of sterling credentials, to talk to your staff members for more than 20 continuous minutes and certainly no more than twice yearly. Because learning is self-appropriated, aspiration and inspiration, while helpful, cannot displace perspiration as the essential ingredient. We learn it by doing it.

Enhancement No. 20
Orchestrate Your Arsenal

Q. *How effective are one-time, single-topic sessions?*

A. Diverse, one-time scattershot programs are rarely effective. Within days, a lingering one-liner and an overflowing circular file are the tangible remnants. While a presenter was found, a presentation was lost. Single-topic activities yield better results when they are essential elements within an overall plan. If the inservice must be a one-time effort, make it an intense one. But be forewarned: In the absence of depth, a cannon is no more effective than a shotgun in killing interest.

Enhancement No. 21
Observe/Demonstrate

Q. *Is teacher observation a viable growth option?*

A. Allowing teachers to observe exemplary peers in other settings and encouraging reciprocal demonstration lessons are often overlooked as growth opportunities. Operational costs are negligible when days normally set aside for staff development are selectively used for planned visits. Mutual visitation is encouraged whenever officials in neighboring districts coordinate staff development calendars. The personal and professional benefits accruing from either viewing or hosting are likely to offset the cost factors. And, teachers enjoy the activity.

Enhancement No. 22
Involve Colleagues

Q. *Should staff members involve colleagues in their self-improvement efforts?*

A. One can certainly pursue an action plan alone. It is more beneficial, however, whenever colleagues work in concert. Most important, while I might be resigned to executing a plan, once I explain it to and involve someone else, I've made an open commitment toward self-improvement. Further collegial interaction can produce additional resources, a progress check, or a personal compliment. We want our peers to value and respect our work. When others don't know what we're doing, however, neither is possible.

Enhancement No. 23
Include the Veterans

Q. *Many older staff members seem to resist staff development efforts. What do you suggest?*

A. "Older" is often viewed as pejorative. Think of experienced personnel as "veterans" having a wealth of appropriate abilities to invest. As we mature, there is a tendency, perhaps, to fear failure, become inflexible, less curious, reluctant to change, and suspicious of reform. Including mature staff in initial planning efforts and providing them with some responsibility for implementing various programs should lower anxiety and raise confidence levels. All reluctant learners are not necessarily veterans; they come in all ages and stages. Fortunately, it's not a permanent affliction—that is, if leaders continue to respect their growth potential.

Enhancement No. 24
Hang in There!

Q. *How do you deal with a staff member who refuses to participate in professional improvement activities?*

A. There are three general responses to a request: (1) "I want to do it," (2) "I don't want to, but I will," and (3) "I won't." A reluctant staff member fits the second category, and as long as this person's effort meets your standard, the behavior is acceptable even though the attitude is not. Category 3 usually represents only a minute fraction of any work force. A continuing refusal to participate in growth efforts is cause for termination, demotion, reassignment, decredentialing, or, if you're fortunate, voluntary early retirement. Occasionally, a blend of tolerance, patience, luck, and support from administrators, plus a bit of pressure from peers, will alter an attitude.

Enhancement No. 25
Polish the Theme

Q. *Should staff development programs have a unified theme?*

A. A unifying theme is optional. Selecting an appropriate long-range theme, however, is important. We can be too absurd—"The Metaphysics of Pragmatism"; too academic—"Left and Right Brain Dominance in Predicting Algebraic Proficiency"; too mundane; or too anything that might dampen enthusiasm and lower expectations. Granted, what one does is more consequential than whatever it's called, but title turn-offs are self-defeating. Carefully selected themes that are brief, clear, precise, relevant, defensible, and workable tend to generate initial interest. What follows can sustain it.

Enhancement No. 26
Probe Away

Q. *Don't some individuals experience difficulty in identifying a staff development opportunity?*

A. It is not unusual for persons unfamiliar with action planning to stall at the start. Here are probes to trigger initial thinking:

- What would I like to accomplish on the job if certain attainable resources were available to me?
- What regularly scheduled school activity could be handled more efficiently?
- What can I do to improve the working relationship I now have with _____?
- What can I do to change (refine, upgrade) _____ within my area of responsibility?
- What recent misunderstanding can I prevent from recurring?
- What can I do to reduce the cost of _____?
- What can I do to raise the level of public understanding and/or confidence in _____?

Everyone should be able to identify a single growth opportunity after exploring these initial probes.

Enhancement No. 27

Develop an Action Plan—A

Q. *You've referred to "action plans." What are they?*

A. An action plan is a design to achieve a specific goal. School personnel formulate such plans individually or in groups. Initially, select a problem, issue, concern, or opportunity that is work-related, resolvable, non-confidential, and troublesome. Now, ask three questions: (1) Are resources readily available?; (2) Is there a willingness to seek assistance?; and (3) Is everyone to be involved also committed? Obviously, the two key words are "resolvable" and "committed"—an individual or group will likely do what is do-able.

Enhancement No. 28
Develop an Action Plan—B

Q. *What criteria apply to individual action plans?*

A. Here's a brief checklist for any staff member designing a personal action plan. Is the problem, issue, concern, or opportunity I've selected:

- Important to me?
- Likely to involve other staff?
- Potentially solvable?
- Something I can improve?
- One on which sufficient information and resources are available?
- One on which I'm willing to invest my time, talent, and energy?

In so "personalizing" the elements of an action plan, we're far more likely to succeed.

Enhancement No. 29
Develop an Action Plan—C

Q. *You've identified the topic—where's the plan?*

A. Once the problem, issue, concern, or opportunity has been identified, we can prepare written responses to these questions:

- What, specifically, will be done?
- Whose help will I enlist, and in what way?
- What are the costs/risks/benefits to me? to my department? to my school?
- How will I know that I've accomplished what was intended?
- When will I start and when will I finish?

These written responses become the action plan.

Enhancement No. 30
Design in Groups—A

Q. *How do you involve an entire faculty on a staff development project?*

A. If faculty members are searching for a group project, here's one way to energize them. Gather the staff members, add a few patrons and central office personnel, and arbitrarily assign them to 7-9 member groups. Distribute 3x5" cards and ask half the groups to complete, individually, as many "This school is _____" statements as they wish. In like manner, ask the remaining groups to complete "If this school were perfect, _____" statements. After discussing and editing the statements within groups, wall mount the results side-by-side on poster paper. Invite comparisons and contrasts. Disparities are guaranteed. Now, ask all small groups to suggest means to move "this school" to the more "perfect" school. The faculty now has taken an initial step toward inventing its own future.

Enhancement No. 31
Design in Groups—B

Q. *O.K., we've generated some ideas. Now what?*

A. After collecting the cards and poster notations, compile a summary without attribution. Delete overlaps but preserve "off-the-wall" suggestions (after all, that's where some of them originated!). Using a modified Delphi technique, circulate the composite list and solicit individual responses. Again, without attribution, collect, refine, and recirculate. Perhaps a third round is needed before clear patterns emerge. Reconvene the original groups and develop a school-based action plan. Once group approval is voiced, schedule 30, 60, and 90-day briefings for progress reports, fine tuning, and appropriate recognition.

Enhancement No. 32
Circle for Quality

Q. *I'd prefer a bit more control. What do you suggest if staff members aren't ready to "invent their future"?*

A. If a more formal approach to problem resolution is desired, one can adopt and adapt the quality circle used successfully in many industrial settings. Here, staff members in small groups convene regularly to identify, discuss, and suggest specific strategies to resolve school-based issues. Administrative commitment to and staff acceptance of the approach are essential. But proceed cautiously. Make certain that sufficient released time is provided, resources are available, and a trained facilitator is assigned. Activate one group and await results before expanding. The quality circle approach demands advanced preparation, high expectations, ample patience, and careful monitoring. But then, promising practices usually do.

Enhancement No. 33
Provide Incentives

Q. *How can I increase voluntary participation in growth efforts?*

A. We'd prefer that all professionals voluntarily and consistently upgrade their skills. Well, not everyone does, nor do most pursue growth opportunities systematically. Acknowledging that central office mandates are dutifully executed, individual efforts can be further stimulated by providing incentives. Formal inducements include priority in attending conferences, merit increments, and tuition rebates. More subtle incentives include the recognizing of voluntary growth activities via internal publication, newspaper feature, or school board citation. Those things that get rewarded get done.

Enhancement No. 34
Be Continuous

Q. *How many staff development programs should we schedule?*

A. Persistency is preferable to paucity. Perhaps nothing erodes growth efforts more readily than sporadic planning. When an August orientation calendar highlights a right/left brain program next April, the activity fades out of sight and out of mind. Many districts publish a separate staff development calendar citing all known school, community, and college events to supplement personal action plans. This is continuous programming. Such concentrated efforts enhance awareness, encourage individual planning, and emphasize the urgency of staff development activities. It's called month-to-month restoration.

Enhancement No. 35
Minimize Failure

Q. *How can I guarantee the success of our staff members' efforts?*

A. While we can't "guarantee" success, satisfying selected operational criteria will lessen the likelihood of failure:

- Is the size of the group appropriate for the intended purpose?
- Are the scheduled time periods appropriate for completing all tasks?
- Is the composition of the group appropriate for the activity?
- Are specific tasks appropriate to the talents and interests of individual staff members?
- Is the physical and psychological climate appropriate for whatever activity is planned?
- Have appropriate means been taken to assess the activity?

On second thought, an affirmative response to these criteria *is* a virtual "guarantee."

Enhancement No. 36
Start Evaluating Up Front

Q. *How do you evaluate staff development efforts?*

A. Let's begin with a "starter" list of pertinent questions:

- Do all staff members know, *up front*, what the performance expectations are?
- Do all staff members know, *up front*, what evaluative criteria are to be used?
- Do all staff members have an opportunity to be actively involved, *up front*, in formulating both performance expectations and evaluative criteria?
- Do all staff members know, *up front*, that feedback will be both constructive and confidential?

Now, once you add your own key questions, you will have answered the original one.

Enhancement No. 37
Approve with Compassion

Q. *Isn't it difficult to know what professional growth plans to approve?*

A. Careful judgment must be exercised in approving personal improvement plans. A staff member requests professional growth credit for attending a critical issues course conducted aboard a cruise ship to Bimini. While we don't apply the "no-pain-no-gain" dictum to staff development, one might wonder whether or not this particular trip is necessary. But then, we can't be certain. A rest-and-relaxation sojourn might be a welcome energizer. Perhaps we need to check out this one personally before approval. Let's see, the next ship departs _____.

Enhancement No. 38
Set and Honor Priorities

Q. *Why do we tend to shortchange staff development programs whenever we face a financial crunch?*

A. Budget cuts are often illogical. Teachers in adequate supply? Trim the recruiting visits. Forget that in a buyer's market one can be more selective. Leaks in the roof? Since repairs are costly, wait until a replacement is needed. Soaring energy costs? Take a quantum leap backward and curtail staff development efforts. Why? Because teachers can hone skills on their own time and pay expenses out-of-pocket. Unfortunately, staff development funds are often axed indiscriminately. What, for example, is initially sacrificed when the annual quota of foul weather days is depleted? Of course. Let's reschedule the inservice activity. Next year. . . maybe. It's all a matter of priorities.

Enhancement No. 39
Inform Your Publics

Q. *Should the public participate in staff development programs?*

A. Public awareness of how school staff members, particularly instructional personnel, are enhancing their skills is essential. One damaging, recurring indictment of schooling is the perceived public notion of predictable sameness—that somehow everything is locked in place once school days end. Knowing that teachers are systematically and continuously upgrading their skills dispels this notion and tends to heighten the confidence level in schooling. And, personally involving citizens, whenever feasible, in staff development efforts further confirms the absence of systemic inertia.

Enhancement No. 40
Pull Together

Q. *Let me summarize for you. Ideally, staff development is an essential, ongoing, all-involving, decentralized, experientially based, cooperatively planned, personally internalized, and carefully monitored process for enhancing skills, changing attitudes, and sharing techniques consistent with and appropriate to the mission of the school. How did I do?*

A. I couldn't have said it better.